



The Johnson Letter

From the desk of
Michigan State Senator

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Johnson Hosts Merit Award Scholarship Preservation Plan to Restore Funding

Senator Shirley Johnson, along with Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming) and Senator Nancy Cassis (R-Novi), hosted a policy roundtable discussion with a collection of local teachers, administrators, parents and students at Oakland Community College's Royal Oak campus this month. The focus of the discussion was to gain input from the "front line" about the Merit Award Scholarship, a \$2,500 contribution from the state to all high school students who score a specified level of proficiency on each of the four sections on the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP).

Governor Granholm had proposed reducing the Merit Scholarship from its \$2,500 level to \$500 for fiscal year 2003-2004, spurring a severe backlash from families across the state. First on the list of complaints was that voters overwhelmingly (66%) voted against a ballot proposal last election redirecting tobacco settlement dollars from the Merit Scholarship Program.

"This program has helped thousands of students in my district obtain or sustain a college education they may otherwise have not had the opportunity to pursue," said Johnson. "My constituents spoke loud and clear last November and I intend to uphold their primary objective."

Assisting in maintaining the funding was Congressional approval of nearly \$ 706 million in aid to Michigan, including \$ 365 million in additional Medicaid funding. This support should allow the Governor and the Legislature to fund the Merit Award Scholarship, along with several other significant programs at last years endowment level.

For more information regarding the Michigan Merit Award Scholarship visit www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/merit. The web-site outlines how the Merit assist hundreds of thousands of families and students make a college education more affordable.

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PUBLIC HEARINGS ON OUT-OF-STATE WASTE CONDUCTED

A series of public hearings intended to allow Michigan residents the opportunity to voice their concerns about the persistent problem of out-of-state waste were announced by the Senate Majority Leader and Speaker of the House this week. The hearings were conducted jointly by the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee and the House

Land Use and Environment Committee. Since January 1, 2003, more than 25 bills or resolutions have been introduced in the Michigan Legislature that would regulate the flow of waste from other states and Canada into Michigan landfills. The joint hearings took testimony from residents and interested parties on the Legislation, and to hear other ideas on how to address the issue. Since the last

two hearings, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture placed a temporary ban on Canadian trash due to a single finding of 'Mad Cow Disease' in a cow in Alberta. The USDA did not indicate how long the ban would be in effect. Nonetheless, the Michigan Legislature will continue receiving testimony and determine if there are any effective measures eliminating the enormous influx of trash.



Senate Halts for Memorial Day Recognition

More than 900,000 Michigan residents served in the armed forces to preserve our freedoms and those of others in foreign lands, and this week the Michigan Senate conducted a memorial ceremony honoring Michigan's past and present soldiers. The ceremony began with the Presentation of the Colors by the Brighton VFW, Post 4357. Included in the ceremony was a processional led by the Kalamazoo Pipe Band, a moment of silence, Military Medley and Processional of Military Branches, a special tribute to current troops, acknowledgment of fallen soldiers, and the performance of Taps and Amazing Grace. The ceremony was highlighted by a keynote address from Dr. Wayne Tucker, a military veteran of over 50 years who has been bestowed with numerous medals and honors from the Armed Forces. The ceremony also honored three of its own members who dedicated a part of their lives to military service. Concluding the festivities was an impressive performance by Troy's Barnard Elementary (pictured at right). The Troy choir performed "Michigan Our Michigan" lead by Music Director Karrie Bojunc .



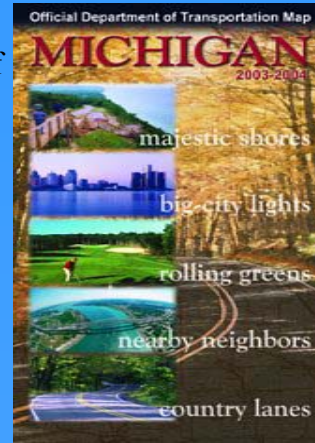
SENATE PASSES MEASURES TO FILL GAP IN 2003 SCHOOL AID FUND AND SAVES K-12 EDUCATION OPERATION FUNDING

Last week the Senate passed legislation ensuring that Michigan's public schools are not forced to shoulder the \$92 million projected shortfall in the School Aid Fund. Figures released from the May Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference, held at the State Capitol on May 13, show a nearly \$92 million budget shortfall in the 2003 School Aid Fund.

Senate Bill 183, which passed the Senate by a unanimous vote, transfers \$61 million from the general fund into the state School Aid Fund. The approximately \$31 million remaining shortfall will be handled by the refinancing of existing bonds. Among the topics of discussion at the conference were the collection of state revenues since January, a picture of the state and national economy and the impact of revenue collections in the 2003 and 2004 fiscal years.

Additionally, the Senate is making steadfast progress in cutting administrative costs for K-12 education by passing two bills giving local school districts flexibility in their operating budgets. This week legislation was sent to the House that streamlines the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) and allows individual districts to decide if they desire to eliminate professional development requirements. Currently, data submitted by schools is submitted to CEPI and numerous other state agencies.

Senate Bill 365 requires that all data submissions will be made directly to CEPI. Senate Bill 366 allows each individual school district to decide if they want to eliminate teacher development requirements. The Senate Fiscal Agency has reported that districts could save between \$35 and \$40 million alone by not having to pay substitute teacher costs while day-to-day teachers are out of the classroom.



The new 2003-2004 State Map is now available in locations throughout Michigan. Produced by MDOT and widely distributed free of charge through Travel Michigan Welcome Centers and MDOT offices, the new edition includes several upgrades: the first

all-electronic map which can be updated instantaneously; new colors that are consistent with nationwide map standards; new bridge rates; new highways now complete; and a new symbol that indicates national forest recreation facilities.

Questions or Comments?

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Please Note: The Johnson Letter is published monthly, for all interested readers, by the Office of State Senator Shirley Johnson.

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